

XIV. *Notes on a protean Indian butterfly, Euplæa (Stictoploea) harrisii, Felder.* By LIONEL DE NICÉVILLE, F.L.S., C.M.Z.S.

[Read October 5th, 1892.]

I HAVE asked my friend Mr. E. Y. Watson to exhibit on my behalf, to the Fellows of the Entomological Society of London, a series of forty-five specimens of a protean species of butterfly, *Euplæa (Stictoploea) harrisii*, Felder, consisting of thirty-three males and twelve females, which I have selected out of a collection of upwards of two hundred caught in the Khasi Hills, Assam, by the native collectors of the Rev. Walter A. Hamilton. These specimens were almost certainly all caught at or close to the village of Chela-punji, at the foot of the hills on the Sylhet side, and at an elevation but slightly above sea-level.

On examination the specimens will be seen to exhibit considerable variation in outline, the wings being broader, and the fore wing more produced at the apex (less rounded) in some specimens than in others. With regard to the markings, the variations are almost bewildering. I have arranged the specimens in two series, the males first, then the females. I have placed at the head of the series the most sparsely-marked specimens, which, as far as the fore wing goes, represent the oldest-named form, and are characteristic of Burma and the Malay Peninsula; and next those with the heaviest-marked fore wing, which are characteristic of Sikkim, at the other end of the geographical range of species. In the Khasi Hills—as demonstrated by the specimens now exhibited—the extremes of both forms with intermediates between them occur. This extraordinary variation in markings is not, in my opinion, due to seasonal or climatic causes, but is probably inherent in the nature of the butterfly itself. This mutability of character has been noted and commented upon in the writings of every field naturalist who has seen these butterflies in life,

but it does not appear to be realised by some cabinet naturalists in Europe.

Dr. Felder, who was the first to describe this species, named the southern form, the one extreme, *Euplœa harrisi*; and the northern form, the other extreme, *E. hopei*. In this he was fully justified, as his material was very limited, as I can testify, having seen his type-specimens in Vienna; and these, taken by themselves, are quite distinct. Mr. Butler then added to the synonymy by describing *Stictoplœa microsticta*, with three submarginal spots to the hind wing on the upper side, and *S. binotata* with two. Lastly, Mr. Moore described *S. regina*, with no spots at all on the hind wing; *S. pygmœa*, which is simply a dwarf of the northern form; and *S. crowleyi*, which combines the characters of the two, having the fore wing of the southern and the hind wing of the northern form. In his 'Lepidoptera Indica,' Mr. Moore admits six of these species as distinct, rejecting only *S. microsticta*, on the ground that it was described from a specimen without locality, and has broader wings than *S. hopei*; and he devotes two plates to the illustrating of them. In the series now exhibited,—taken, let me repeat for the sake of emphasis, in a single spot,—every one of these species can be accurately matched; and, as they are now proved to intergrade one into the other, and also are not confined to any geographical region, these seven species must be reduced to one. If stay-at-home naturalists would only pay a little more heed to the observations of field naturalists, such results would not have to be deplored. Messrs. Wood-Mason, Marshall, Elwes, Adamson, Watson, and the writer have all drawn attention to the fact that the species of certain groups of *Euplœa*, including this one, are eminently variable, as our field observations had proved them to be; and yet these expressed opinions of competent naturalists are persistently passed over in silence, and ignored by those who have never seen an *Euplœa* alive in its native home.